Territorial Dynamics of Multipolar Conflict in Colombia

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Abstract: This paper disentangles the complexity of the Colombian conflict using new municipal-level data that captures the territorial presence of 30 different Colombian armed actors between 1988 and 2014. The study identifies patterns of territorial control and contestation over time and space, and measures the impact of different conflict patterns on violence. The dataset was generated using automated event coding from conflict reports issued by Noche y Niebla, a prestigious source published by the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (Cinep). The study disaggregates broad categories of actors including government authorities (7 groups), guerilla organizations (6 subgroups), paramilitaries (10 subgroups), and criminal organizations (7 subgroups). Using fine-grained data at the municipal-level, the paper presents novel insights about the multipolar nature of conflict in Colombia, a characteristic that makes it one of the world’s most complicated and seemingly intractable conflicts. The paper contributes to the study of civil war by offering new empirical evidence to extend expand explanations of conflict dynamics and violence.

Javier Osorio is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY. He obtained his PhD in political science from the University of Notre Dame. His research interests are located at the intersection of political violence, quantitative research methods and natural language processing. In particular, his academic agenda is focused on understanding the causes and consequences of political violence and organized criminal violence in Latin America. To conduct his research, Dr. Osorio co-developed Eventus ID, a software for automated coding of event data from text written in Spanish. Recent expansions of the software allow coding in Portuguese, French and Russian. This software is used to create massive databases of violent behavior by extracting information from newspapers in their native language. This data has been used to analyze the temporal and spatial dynamics of rebel organizations, organized criminal actors, vigilante groups, social movements in different Latin American countries. To conduct his research, Dr. Osorio has received grants and fellowships provided by the National Science Foundation, the Social Science Research Council – Open Society Foundations, the United States Institute of Peace, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the University of Notre Dame, Yale University and Cornell University.